

Testimony of The Village for Families & Children  
Proposed FY23 Budget for Human Services Agencies  
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Appropriations Committee, February 23, 2022

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Yvette Young and I have the privilege of working for The Village for Families & Children. The Village for Families & Children is a 200 +- year-old nonprofit dedicated to transforming the lives of children, youth, and adults in Connecticut. Our impact can be found in the 18, 854 of children, adults and families who have overcome enormous challenges to achieve real and meaningful change in their lives with help from the treatment, services, and advocacy of The Village. It is these lives and the countless others we have yet to serve that compels me to advocate for increase in funding to non-profits to ensure the well-being of those most vulnerable in our communities.

I have worked in the non-profit sector my entire professional career. When I accepted my first position in a non-profit over 20 years ago, the salary I received was substantially lower than that of my friends who worked for the State, a hospital or for-profit organizations. I was not deterred by the huge salary gap between myself and my peers because the narrative was always that we do good work in non-profit community-based organizations and the impact we have is greater than any salary we receive. Over 20 years later this narrative continues, but with a compromised work force it is no longer enough to convince potential employees that nonprofit work is noble work. Employees must be adequately compensated, especially when there is competition for their services. Nonprofits have made miracles happen with flat funding, but we should not have to be magicians when it comes to caring for the most vulnerable people in our communities.

I am one of the leaders for our Residential services at The Village, and during COVID and beyond, I have seen the impact directly of the necessity of nonprofit services as well as the impact COVID has had on staffing. During the past 2 years, we have seen high turnover rates in our residential services and have struggled to recruit staff for our programs. As an organization we made the decision to offer hazard pay to our staff in recognition of the sacrifice they were making working in person daily. We decided that to retain our workforce we would need to maintain the increase the hazard pay created for these employees. This decision meant the organization had to identify the additional unfunded dollars to ensure we would be able to provide the essential care required for children being served in our programs - a burden the Village was willing to endure because we are committed to the needs of our staff and the children, adults, and families we serve. Currently the capacity in non-profit organizations is stretched thin due in large part to insufficient resources. Leaving us to compete with the health systems and the public sector for employees. To compete we need funding to offer competitive wages. We are asking that you honor the long-term plan to address the underfunding of community nonprofits by \$461 million by providing an additional eight percent (at least \$150 million) in the mid-term FY 23 budget.

In the Governor's budget there is additional funds being allocated to DCF to support crisis and emergency services, such as urgent crisis centers, Eds, inpatient units, and sub-acute crisis

stabilization units, which are needed services in our continuum of care. At a time when we are facing a children's mental health crisis it is concerning that \$8 million is being cut from DCF's general fund. What the current budget fail to do is recognize the needs of our community beyond the crisis. Children and families will need to be connected to community-based services (outpatient and intermediate level of care) provided by their local non-profit. Our children are dying from suicides and overdoses. They are depressed, anxious and disconnected and they are being parented by individuals who are also depressed and anxious. They need immediate support, and they should not have to wait for their symptoms to elevate to a crisis level before they gain access to the support they need.

The DCF budget is also being cut by over \$15 million dollars for caseload driven expenditures for out of home care such as adoption, subsidized guardianship, foster care, residential services and individualized payments. This cut will further impact the BIPOC community and deepen the disparity within our system. People of color are disproportionately represented in every part of the child welfare system. Cutting resources from DCF and underfunding non-profit organizations who provide intermediate, and outpatient level of care will have a tremendous impact on the BIPOC community, which will continue to widen the equity gap. Insufficient funding to support these communities turns this funding discussion into a racial justice conversation. To eliminate systemic racism, we must make decisions that provides the funding necessary to support organizations providing quality care for the BIPOC community. Dismantling systemic racism requires the utilization of a racial justice lens when budgets are being developed and decisions are being made about how to allocate funds. It is imperative that funds are allocated to community-based organizations working to eradicate systemic racism by providing access to needed resources for the BIPOC community.

We must not underestimate the impact of community-based programs in prevention and healing. Without adequate funding we will not be able to meet the mental health needs of our communities, especially the BIPOC community. We will not be able to reduce our wait lists. We will not be able to prevent children from getting stuck in higher levels of care due to community-based programs not having the staffing to provide them with the care they need. We will not be able to prevent the burn out we are experiencing in our essential workers because of the turnover in staffing and the limited resources available to fill those positions. We will not be able to provide quality care for our children, adults and families and the current mental health crisis we are experiencing will intensify.

I appeal to you to think of those among us who are most vulnerable and when you vote please vote to increase funding which will support them at all levels of care in our continuum of care.